
Appendix **C** *Public Workshops*

The Southwest Downtown Plan evolved in consultation with area residents, employees and property owners in all phases of its development. An open house was held in November 2002 to introduce the planning process, assess neighborhood concerns and answer questions about new development already in progress (particularly the Municipal Office Complex). In February 2003 a survey was distributed to neighborhood stakeholders (property owners, residents, business owners and tenants) to assess their concerns and identify topics for discussion in neighborhood workshops. Eleven of these workshops were held over fifteen months, where these concerns were discussed and options for addressing them evaluated. Finally, comments from stakeholders and the general public will be solicited in public hearings before the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council as part of the Plan's adoption process.

Public Workshops (June 2003 – September 2004)

Eleven workshops were held between June 2003 and September 2004 to discuss planning issues and assess the priorities and preferences of the participants. Announcements of each meeting were mailed (and/or emailed) to all area property owners, employers, residents and tenants, as well as those who attended the November 2002 open house, or who requested to be added to the contact list. Notices were also posted on the City calendar and website, in the Round Rock *Leader* and the *Austin-American Statesman*. Summaries of each meeting were posted on the Southwest Downtown Plan website soon afterward for the benefit of those unable to attend. These summaries are given on the following pages (most illustrations and handouts have been omitted for the sake of brevity and because they appear elsewhere in the Plan).

Acknowledgements

The Planning & Community Development Department would like to thank public workshop participants, presenters and other City Staff who contributed to the public workshops.

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Workshop Summaries:

These summaries were written and posted on the web shortly after each workshop, and do not reflect later updates. Some items, particularly timelines, have changed significantly. They are included here as background information only. Please refer to the Plan chapters for current information.

June 3, 2003: Land Use & Zoning

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Introduction:

The Southwest Downtown Plan is intended to allow residents, business and property owners to agree on a direction that changes should take, and create guidelines so that they are sensitive to the Plan Area's character and scale – and so that the qualities that drew people to locate their homes and businesses here are preserved. These guidelines may include rezoning, infrastructure improvements, or landscaping and design guidelines, depending on the direction chosen by participants.

Discussion of survey:

Executive Director Joe Vining referred to a handout to discuss the results of the Southwest Downtown Survey, which was the basis for selecting meeting topics. Not surprisingly, the most frequently cited issues of concern were traffic and parking. The next most frequently-cited issues (conversion of houses to businesses, community appearance, historic and tree preservation) indicate a strong interest and concern for the Plan Area's character and appearance. Next were infrastructure issues: sidewalks, drainage and the new Municipal Office Complex. Less commonly-cited issues included changes in neighborhood character & identity, vandalism, and housing affordability.

70% of the respondents had owned business or property in the area less than 10 years, a figure that parallels the percentage of Round Rock residents who have lived in the City less than 10 years.

Description of the Municipal Office Complex:

The McConico Building is the first of the Municipal Office Complex (MOC) buildings to be completed. The MOC will eventually include a Senior Activity Center and City Hall, which will surround a Civic Plaza. There will be two levels of underground parking, and walkways between buildings will access a future trail along Lake Creek. The Senior Activity Center and Plaza are expected to be completed in 2005, and the City Hall several years later. The fire station on Florence will be relocated to accommodate the City Hall.

The City has worked out a centralized stormwater drainage system for the Plan Area. Rather than small water quality ponds on individual properties, most stormwater will drain into a single water quality pond on the other side of McNeil Road.

It was also noted that Lake Creek will eventually be part of a citywide greenbelt/trail system.

Current zoning and permitted land uses:

Currently the Southwest Downtown Plan Area is divided in four zoning districts. Most of the area is zoned C-1 (General Commercial). There are a few remaining houses zoned SF-2 (Single Family Residential – Standard Lot), and a few of them are in the process of being rezoned C-2 (Neighborhood Commercial). The block that includes the SBC facility and Lee's Auto Body is zoned LI (Light Industrial). All the zoning changes in the Plan Area have been owner-initiated.

Each Zoning District specifies which uses are permitted and which are not. Uses that are permitted by right are allowed under all circumstances, and conditional uses are permitted if the property meets a few extra criteria, e.g. a minimum lot size, maximum building size, frontage on a collector or higher street, etc.

Dot-voting exercise:

Participants were given 20 dot stickers, and instructed to use them to vote for the land uses they believe are appropriate for the Southwest Downtown Plan Area. They were instructed not to use more than 5 of their dots on any one use, not to trade dots with other participants, and not to cover up each others' dots. All dots are considered favorable votes; there are no "against" votes.

Answers to participants' questions about land uses:

- The difference between "food sales" and "eating establishments" is that food (prepared or not) is not consumed on the premises in food sales; there are no eating areas. Customer traffic patterns are different, and these establishments have different impacts on their neighbors.
- "Mixed use" means two or more uses in a small area – the same block, the same lot, or the same building. The classic example is apartments or offices over ground-floor retail. The permitted uses must be carefully defined, because some uses are incompatible, or become incompatible beyond a certain scale.
- The "senior" district is a new addition to the zoning ordinance. This is housing specifically for senior citizens and can take the form of anything with a senior-oriented amenity package, from single-family houses to assisted living facilities.
- A participant asked why "place of worship" was permitted in all districts. The law limits the restrictions that a city can put of religious activity. While the place of worship itself – the sanctuary – is permitted in any district, the square footage of accessory uses (such as offices, day care, schools, gyms, garage sales etc.) are limited.
- The difference between "auto service" and "vehicle repair" is that auto service facilities work on the car while the owner is there, while cars may stay at a vehicle repair facility for several days.
- "Commercial parking" is paid parking not associated with any other use (e.g. a lot or ramp may be next to a restaurant but is not specifically for the use of that restaurant's patrons).

June 3, 2003 **Land Use Voting Exercise** (350 total votes)

<u>votes</u>	<u>land use:</u>
34	Eating Establishments
32	Retail Sales & Services
30	Limited Art & Craft Studio
26	Office
26	Upper-Story Residential
24	Administrative & Business Services
22	Single-Family Residence
18	Bed & Breakfast
15	Passenger Terminals
14	Townhouse Residences
12	Assisted Living, Museum
11	Community Services, Food Sales
8	Plant Nursery
7	Commercial Parking, Medical office
6	Indoor Entertainment Activities, Laundry Services & Dry Cleaning, Outdoor Entertainment
5	Day Care, Park

uses eliminated in this exercise

<u>votes</u>	<u>land use:</u>
4	Cocktail Lounge/Bar
3	Personal Improvement Services
2	Research Services
1	Amenity Center, Auto Service Facilities, Duplex, Liquor Sales
0	Carwash, Communications Services, Equipment Repair Services, Financial Services, Funeral Home, General/Limited Warehousing & Distribution, Government Facilities, Indoor Sports & Recreation, Light Manufacturing & Assembly, Multifamily Residences, Place of Worship, Retail Sales & Services w/ Outdoor Storage, Self-Service Storage, Service Station, Theater, Utilities, Minor & Intermediate, Vehicle Repair Facilities & Body Shops, Vehicle Sales, Rental or Leasing Facilities, Veterinary Services, Warehouse & Freight Movement, Wholesale Trade, Wireless Transmission Facilities

June 24, 2003: Land Use & Zoning

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Discussion of the MOC plans:

The other buildings in the MOC complex, and their underground parking, were described. The Senior Center and Plaza are the next buildings to be constructed, and at this time completion is anticipated in mid-2005.

Area demographics:

Staff distributed a handout of 2000 Census figures comparing the Southwest Downtown Plan Area to all of Round Rock, as an insight to the Plan Area's demographic makeup. The most striking distinctions were the difference in median age (53.9 years in the Plan Area vs. 30.1 years in the City as a whole), and the difference in proportion of people over 65 (28% vs. 4%, respectively).

Discussion of first voting exercise:

The first dot-voting exercise presented a chart of 52 different land uses to be considered for the Plan Area. Participants were given a sheet of 20 dot stickers and instructed to indicate the uses they considered appropriate, and not to put more than 5 dots on any one use.

The uses with the most votes were: eating establishments; retail sales & services; limited arts & craft studio; office; upper-story residential; administrative & business services; and single-family residences. Twenty-four uses did not receive any votes. [The complete listing of uses is given in Figure 3.2.]

Second voting exercise:

The top 22 uses from the first dot-voting exercise were posted on a chart for the second exercise. The procedure was similar, except that each participant was given 8 dots and instructed not to use more than 2 dots on any one use. Results will be analyzed by Staff and reported at the next meeting.

The purpose of the exercises is to determine whether the uses that stakeholders consider appropriate for the area coincide with the uses permitted by the current zoning, and if not, whether other existing zoning districts are appropriate, or if a new zoning district should be created.

Participants asked for clarification of several of the proposed land uses for the exercise:

- "Indoor Entertainment" is an indoor activity, participatory or not, such as a bowling alley, video arcade, etc.

- “Townhouses” under Round Rock’s Zoning Ordinance are moderate-density attached housing units at a maximum density of 12 units/acre. They are configured for owner occupation under either a condominium or fee simple arrangement, although there is nothing to prevent individual owners from renting out their units.
- Pictures on the illustration boards are intended to be an indication of the overall form and scale that the proposed uses generally take – they are not intended to indicate architectural style.

Drawing exercise:

In this exercise potential zoning district boundaries were traced over an aerial photo of the Southwest Downtown Plan Area to test different arrangements and solicit public comment.

All zoning scenarios have these elements in common:

- The Lake Creek floodplain is zoned OS (Open Space), because it is unsuitable for building and is expected to eventually be part of a citywide trail system.
- The new Municipal Office Complex (MOC) site will be zoned PF (Public Facilities).

Scenario #1:



This scenario is intended to describe how the Plan Area is evolving now. Currently only a few properties are *not* already zoned C-1: a Light Industrial block (SWB and Lee’s garage), and a few Single-Family parcels near Main and San Saba. In this scenario, the entire Plan Area other than the MOC and the trail would eventually be zoned C-1.

Scenario #2:



This scenario leaves the area along major streets General Commercial, but the interior of the neighborhood is designated C-2 (Neighborhood Commercial). C-2 permits most of the uses permitted in C-1, but on a smaller scale, limiting the height and square footage of buildings, and prohibiting intense commercial uses such as auto body shops.

Scenario #3:



This scenario is similar to #2, but does not cut across lot lines and accommodates existing C-1 uses near Main and Blair.

Scenario #4:



In this scenario only the two properties with IH-35 frontage are zoned C-1, and the rest is zoned MU – Mixed Use [note: later only the north property would remain C-1].

There are several ways that a mixed-use district could be accomplished. One way is to use a Planned Unit Development (PUD), in which a unique mix of uses and design standards are negotiated for specific area. The advantage of this method is a great deal of flexibility; the disadvantages are that it

makes the development process slow and cumbersome, and that it is more appropriate for large tracts with a single owner/developer.

Another way would be to create a mixed-use district, similar in principle to other overlay districts in the current zoning ordinance. What “mixed use” would mean for the Plan Area would have to be defined. A set of permitted uses would be established, based on input from the community (including the land use dot-voting exercises), as would a set of compatibility standards to ensure that different uses can exist harmoniously side by side. A set of design and/or landscaping standards may also be appropriate to give a set of disparate uses a more unified appearance.

Discussion:

- Several participants asked what uses would be included under a mixed-use zoning district, and how it would differ from C-1. Permitted uses would be based on public input, such as the two dot-voting exercises. Additional measures might include height limits lower than the 5 stories permitted in C-1 districts.
- A participant commented that creating a mixed-use zone would permit a closer definition of use and form than using existing zoning districts.
- One resident noted that the fact that her house was zoned C-1 would prevent a family from getting a residential mortgage to buy her house, and wanted to know if mixed-use zoning would allow continuing residential use of her house. Staff answered that they expected it would, since it would indicate that the City's intention is not to eliminate residential use from the area, but someone in the lending industry could give a more definitive answer.
- Several participants wondered how mixed-use zoning would affect their property values and tax assessments.
- When a property's zoning is changed so that it no longer accommodates the existing use, the use is considered nonconforming. A nonconforming use may continue, but may not expand, and when the property is sold it must adhere to uses permitted by the new zoning.

Conclusions:

None of the participants agreed that the current zoning should be left alone as in Scenario #1. By consensus, participants preferred Scenario #4.

July 15, 2003: Traffic & Circulation

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Brainstorming exercise:

This meeting was the first of two on the subject of traffic and circulation. Tom Word, Public Works' Chief of Operations, was present to answer questions and conduct a brainstorming exercise in which participants voiced their concerns and ideas about how to improve traffic in the Plan Area. At the following meeting Staff will present possible solutions for discussion.

The following issues emerged in the ensuing discussion (grouped by topic):

- Traffic on the major roads (IH-35, FM 620, Mays and McNeil) is heavy and only getting heavier. The challenge is how to accommodate increased traffic while being pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.
- At McNeil and IH-35, the northbound exit and the southbound entrance ramps will be closed when the ramps in the area are changed to connect to SH 45 (approximately 18 months from now). This may also discourage traffic that cuts through from US 79 via Georgetown Avenue, Main Street and Burnet Avenue to McNeil.

- The southbound off ramp from IH-35 to FM 1325 is scheduled to be closed to accommodate toll entrances to SH 45. Southbound access to La Frontera will be through Hesters Crossing – which participants did not like. The City is trying to convince TxDOT that this is undesirable and will cause traffic to backup on IH-35.
- TxDOT has planned HOV (high-occupancy vehicle) lanes for IH-35, but with their current budget they are unlikely to be added for at least 13 years.
- Union Pacific has approved the City's plan for a railroad crossing at A.W. Grimes Boulevard, which will hopefully open in early 2005. This will relieve some of the traffic on Mays. More new north-south arterials are planned on both sides of IH-35.
- The City is working on a public transportation plan, now that it is too big to qualify for CARTS (which is intended as a rural service). The type of system depends on the budget.
- There is a rail district proposal, which would create a commuter rail system from Georgetown to San Antonio, but there are several problems: 1) freight rail companies would have to agree to move to a different set of tracks, and 2) it's very expensive.
- East and West Main Street need to be better connected, both for pedestrians and cars. The City is working on improving the pedestrian crossing.
- A participant asked about using one-way streets in the Plan Area.
- West Main could be extended to the frontage road to relieve some of the traffic turning east on Round Rock Avenue. The exit ramp would have to join the frontage road north of the intersection with Main so that drivers aren't tempted to cut across all lanes of the frontage road in a short distance.
- Turning left onto Round Rock Avenue is very difficult; it would help to have a light between Mays and IH-35.
- If Harris went all the way to Round Rock Avenue (through the Golden Chick), instead of stopping at Liberty, there would be a direct route to the new Senior Activity Center and Municipal Office Complex.
- Many people avoid the Mays – Main - Round Rock Avenue intersection by cutting through on Liberty and turning left at Mays. It would be helpful to have a traffic light synchronized with the one at Mays – Main - Round Rock Avenue.
- Another participant suggested closing Round Rock Avenue between Brown and Mays, routing traffic onto Liberty. West Main would be reconnected to Mays, and then both Liberty - Mays and Main-Mays would be 4-way intersections at right angles. The closed portion of the street could become a public square or park.
- People often get confused on Blair, because they come quickly off McNeil, and first there's a stop sign, then there's not, the road changes widths and there are several different street parking configurations. Cars frequently get sideswiped.
- Wayfinding signs would be helpful – many people have difficulty finding the new Municipal Court and have to stop to ask for directions.
- There should be uniform street sections for the Plan Area, so that street widths, controls, sidewalks, bicycle paths, markings, signs and street parking arrangements are consistent.
- Participants would like to see streetscape improvements similar to East Main.
- Big oak trees should be preserved in streetscaping plans. Most rights-of-way in the Plan Area are 80 feet wide, so there is room to adjust parking and planting strips around them.

- Participants were asked where the major pedestrian routes in the Plan Area are. They cited the Liberty-Mays and Main-Mays crossings. Alleys were suggested as pedestrian paths. Mays, Blair and Brown were cited as important north-south pedestrian routes.
- It would be logical to have a good pedestrian connection between the new and old City office complexes, perhaps under the Mays overpass.
- It's important to extend pedestrian access from the city blocks to the trail along Lake Creek, which will eventually extend through the City.
- Participants noted cut-through truck traffic in the Plan Area.
- Some delivery trucks park on the street, creating a hazard. A cited location was on Brown just south of Round Rock Avenue, where cars turning right onto Brown may not see them in time.
- Trees and wires make some alleys unsuitable for truck deliveries.

August 4, 2003: Traffic & Circulation

Planning Department Meeting Room, 7:00-8:20 p.m.

At the previous meeting, Tom Word, Public Works' Chief of Operations, had taken questions and suggestions about traffic issues in the Southwest Downtown Plan Area. He had discussed them with his staff and was ready to give their recommendations regarding these issues and discuss alternatives, although final decisions will be made at a later date.

Round Rock Avenue - Liberty Avenue - Mays Street:

At the July 15th meeting there were many complaints about the Round Rock Avenue - Mays - Main intersection. Many felt that the intersection is intimidating for pedestrians and destroys continuity between East and West Main Street. During rush hour traffic backs up far enough that it's difficult to turn onto Round Rock Avenue from Brown or Blair. Another consequence of traffic backing up on Round Rock Avenue is that many turn onto Liberty, and then try to turn left onto Mays, although there is no traffic signal there. Other participants noted that it was difficult to turn onto westbound Round Rock Avenue for access to the freeway.

One participant had suggested closing Round Rock Avenue between Liberty and Mays, directing traffic from Round Rock Avenue to Liberty and Brown (see street layout diagram, pg. B-24). East and West Main Street would be directly connected in a standard 4-way intersection. Signals on Mays Street at Liberty and Main would be synchronized. The closed portion of Round Rock Avenue could become a public space, or the downtown grid could be extended.

Under this plan, the Round Rock Avenue - Liberty - Brown intersection would be an easily signaled Y-intersection, with traffic heading to north Mays diverted to Liberty and then to a standard, signaled 4-way intersection at Liberty and Mays. Eastbound and southbound traffic would be directed south on Brown to Main St (the Brown - Main intersection may then require modification). The Main - Mays intersection would be a standard 4-way intersection (the well canopy would be moved – again), and the two signals on Mays would be synchronized. The Round Rock Avenue - Liberty - Brown signal would also provide a controlled access to westbound Round Rock Avenue from the Plan Area.

Extend Main Street to frontage road:

Another suggestion was to extend Main Street to the west across the creek to connect with the frontage road. This would relieve some of the congestion at the IH-35 - Round Rock Avenue intersection, and increase traffic on West Main. An additional signal may be necessary at Main and Brown, especially if the changes at Round Rock Avenue - Liberty - Brown are implemented. The

connection to the frontage road would have to be south (“upstream”) from the exit so that drivers could not exit and immediately cross three lanes of frontage road to access Main Street.

Extend Harris Street to Round Rock Avenue:

Another suggestion was extending Harris Street north to intersect with Round Rock Avenue and closing the Liberty Avenue - Round Rock Avenue intersection (on the south side of Round Rock Avenue), keeping Round Rock Avenue - Liberty - Brown a simpler 3-way intersection. This would provide a direct route from Round Rock Avenue to the new Senior Center at Harris and Brown. The City would have to purchase right-of-way where the Golden Chick drive-thru is now.

Other street layout issues:

Many of the intersections in the Plan Area are unregulated; it is expected that most will have 2- or 4-way stop signs, but the controls used will depend on what, if any, changes are made in street layout and traffic patterns.

Cut-through traffic was discussed at the previous meeting. Most of the problems are in the Georgetown – Main – Burnet route, and it is expected that the opening of A. W. Grimes Boulevard and closure of the McNeil entrance and exit to IH-35 will greatly decrease this problem.

One-way streets had been suggested, but were determined to be inappropriate since they are unnecessary and would make navigation more confusing.

Another suggestion was to use alleys as pedestrian routes, but this would create a lot of mid-block street crossings where there are no traffic signals and drivers do not expect to encounter pedestrians crossing the street, and would therefore be very unsafe. The department concluded that the alleys were designed strictly for service use, and should remain that way.

Street design:

Another issue of significant concern is the inconsistency in street paving and design. The Department would address these issues by improving the streets with curbs and gutters (no drainage swales), and diverting storm drainage to a retention pond on the other side of McNeil. A set of standard street sections would be created to maximize on-street parking and keep curbs and sidewalks consistent and continuous. Signage and pavement markings would be applied consistently, and everything possible would be done to keep the trees that are so important to the Plan Area’s character and history.

A page of proposed street sections was distributed. It was explained that these are standard sections, and that it will require more study to determine the best arrangement of traffic, parking, sidewalk and landscaped areas. Accommodation would also have to be made for bus stops or drop-off areas.

The 4-lane undivided section is more or less what currently exists on Round Rock Avenue. If part of Round Rock Avenue is closed, diverting traffic to Liberty and Brown, two blocks of Liberty may also take this 4-lane, no parking configuration, since it is expected to take most of the Round Rock Avenue traffic.

Divided street sections (with medians) are proposed for Brown and Main Streets. The 2-lane divided section with 45° angled parking is proposed for Main; this is the same section as the first two blocks of East Main Street, but without parking in the median. The 2-lane divided section with parallel parking is proposed for Brown. Parallel parking does not yield as many spaces as angled parking, but it has been shown to make parking easier for older people (Brown is a main route to the WBCO building and the future Senior Activity Center). The Brown - Main intersection may merit special treatment or signaling.

Minor/local streets would adopt a 2-lane undivided section with 30° angled parking. 30° parking does not yield as many spaces as 45° parking, but uses less of the right-of-way, allowing for more landscaping.

Sidewalks, pedestrian routes & bike lanes:

Although all the streets in the Southwest Downtown Plan Area will have sidewalks on both sides, it is still important to identify main pedestrian routes which connect significant destinations (such as schools) and possess certain safety features such as crossing busy streets at controlled intersections. Transportation Staff prepared a map of such routes, illustrating primary pedestrian routes throughout the western half of downtown and connections to the future bike & trail system along the creeks. A participant commented that many kids walk to school on Liberty, and suggested that it be added as a principal pedestrian route.

One thing that these sections don't include is a bike path system. Within the 80-foot right-of-way there really isn't room for traffic lanes, bike lanes, parking and sidewalks – it seems to come down to bike lanes or parking. A participant commented that the area does need better accommodation for bicycles – especially with the school nearby – and that there really should be at least one safe route in and out of the area, perhaps on Main, connecting to the trails along Lake and Brushy Creeks. Mr. Word agreed that Public Works would consider it.

Another participant asked if there were room for a bicycle lane on Mays. The Mays right-of-way is already pretty much filled, with buildings right up to its edge, so finding room for bike lanes is unlikely as it would involve either removing a traffic lane or some buildings.

Delivery trucks:

Truck traffic is an inevitable consequence of business activity, but problems can be dealt with by working with business owners on a case-by-case basis to arrange for appropriate loading zones, off-hours or small-truck delivery.

IH-35 changes:

The completion of SH 45 will necessitate closing several ramps near the IH-35 - SH 45 intersection, including the McNeil exit and entrance ramp. The Hesters exit is expected to take the bulk of the diverted traffic. TxDOT is planning for HOV (high-occupancy vehicle, a.k.a. carpool) lanes on IH-35 in the future, but probably not for 15-20 years, unless alternate funding sources are found.

Public transit:

Regional rail (San Antonio to Georgetown) is still under consideration, but the main problem is funding. There is a proposed funding district, but it has no taxing authority and at least for the immediate future, none of the cities is in a position to make a serious financial commitment. Express busses could be used in the meantime, but are unlikely to be used much if they are stuck in traffic with everyone else. HOV lanes would solve this problem, but are unlikely to be constructed in the near future.

Round Rock will need to have its own internal bus system, but it will have to be funded by something other than sales taxes. The City is not a member of Capital Metro, and probably never will be because it would cost \$20 million a year, and property taxes would increase 20 cents per \$100. Other Texas cities with populations under 100,000 spend less than \$2.5 million - \$3 million per year on their bus systems.

September 16, 2003: Civic Design: Streets, Sidewalks & Parking

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-8:20 p.m.

Introduction:

Executive Director Joe Vining welcomed participants and introduced consultant Donna Carter of Carter Design Associates, which the Department has hired to analyze the area's historic patterns of design and development and incorporate them into district design guidelines.

Visual survey of area characteristics:

As part of their analysis, Ms. Carter's firm had conducted a visual survey to identify aspects of the Plan Area's historical development pattern that give it character -- things that stand out as "neighborhood quirks" and could be preserved and encouraged or accommodated in future development. In order to preserve a pattern, she noted, you first need to recognize it.

Ms. Carter discussed their findings, referring to four display boards describing conditions on:

- 100 block of West Main Street** (between Mays and Blair)
- 200 block of West Main Street** (between Blair and Brown)
- 300 block of West Main Street** (between Brown and Harris)
- 200 block of West Bagdad Avenue** (between Blair and Brown)

Each board illustrated analysis of a single block. Each included a list of the block's most interesting features, photo collages of both sides of the street, and a historic Sandborn Insurance map of the block.

One characteristic the Carter Design Associates team immediately noticed was that properties generally face the more formal east-west streets. The north-south streets are more like side streets: narrower and more informal (although all the streets within the district (except West Main) have the same right-of-way, the width of paved road surface varies considerably). The character of the street pattern is important not only as a framework for development but also because the streetscape is the Plan Area's largest and most significant public space.

Originally, most blocks in the downtown area were served by alleys. A few are still in use; others exist legally but have been physically obscured by trees and outbuildings. Their potential for service access and parking should be considered. Alternatively, there have also been proposals to give the alleys to adjacent property owners, a proposal that could become part of the utility plan.

The firm observed that West Main Street has a unique set of conditions. It is the only street within the district that has a 100-foot right-of-way instead of 80-foot. The buildings become less dense and are set back further from the street as it progresses west. The 100 block (between Mays and Blair) is commercial, with traditional storefronts built all the way up to the front (and side) property lines, creating a very direct relationship with passers-by. On the 200 block, buildings begin to be set back from the property line and there are a few houses. Newer residential and commercial buildings on the 300 block are also set back 15-18 feet; a traditional measure significantly shorter than is typical of suburban development. How this historical trend should be continued or adapted to new buildings (and building types) should be considered in the Plan.

One way to increase historic continuity is to look at the Plan Area's traditional palate of materials. A distinctive example is the mortared stone curbs that lie near the front property line of a number of properties. In most cases grass has grown up around them. They are a rather unique and subtle way of delineating private and public space, and incorporating them or otherwise making reference to them in a new streetscape design could make it seem to be a more naturally evolving streetscape than an imposed one [note: the curbs are most visible on the north side of West Bagdad between Blair and Brown].

One of the attractive things about the area is its many large specimen trees. Some of the trees are actually in the right-of-way, and parking spaces are worked around them. This casual arrangement is an important part of the area's character, and should be continued with new street trees planted close to traffic lanes, to shade the street and allow for natural cycling as some of the less-healthy trees die.

The quality of the pedestrian environment is another essential consideration. A good pedestrian environment, with shade, places to sit, lighting and landscaping gives the public street space

character, and makes the area feel more like a district than a series of destinations. Strong connections between the neighborhood and the open space (and future trails) along Lake Creek are equally important issues to be addressed.

Parking configurations for Brown Street and Main Street:

The next phase of the Municipal Office Complex, the Senior Activity Center, may begin construction as early as January. In order to finalize construction plans, some decisions need to be made about nearby street improvements, which are part of the project. Mr. Vining invited participants to take a break and look at three sets of illustrations describing different street parking configurations at the Brown and Main Street intersection. Each arrangement permitted a different number of parking spaces and additional street trees:

Angled parking on both Brown and Main Streets: 78 spaces / 24 new trees

Parallel parking on both Brown and Main Streets: 61 spaces / 71 new trees

Combination parking: Parallel on Brown, angled on Main: 71 spaces / 46 new trees

The combination “angled on Brown, parallel on Main” was not considered because one of the aims of the project is to create continuity with the angled parking pattern on East Main. Perpendicular (90-degree) parking was not considered because it requires too much right-of-way.

These illustrations were accompanied by street section drawings describing angled and parallel parking on both Brown and Main. All scenarios include street trees and ample sidewalk/landscaping areas. Both Main Street sections included a center turning lane. It was noted that these diagrams should be considered prototypes; a specific design would need to accommodate specific conditions such as trees and driveways.

Participants were asked for their comments on the proposed parking scenarios, which included the following:

- A participant suggested that if the parking arrangement did not allow much room for trees in the right-of-way, shade could still be provided by planting trees in private yards, next to the sidewalk (with the owner's permission).
- Round Rock does not use compact parking spaces; any arrangement will be able to accommodate larger vehicles.
- A participant commented that parallel parking somehow feels more crowded.
- The biggest problem with parallel parking is that it's difficult and no one knows how to do it anymore since it's not required on drivers' tests.
- Under an alternative angled parking arrangement, drivers back into an angled spot instead of heading in (much like backing into a parallel parking space). This permits much better visibility when pulling out into the street.
- Although there are many big old trees in the Plan Area, not all are in good health, and some will die – it would be a good idea to start planting other trees now, so that they have grown by the time the old trees are gone.
- Having to park a block or so from one's destination becomes less of a problem when the walk is pleasant; when the streetscape is well-designed, with shade canopies and generous sidewalks.
- There are plans to eventually put most utilities underground.

Mr. Vining asked participants for positive and negative points about each parking arrangement, and wrote them down. Participants then voted for their preferred configuration with a dot sticker. Their comments and the voting results are listed below [explanatory notes in square brackets]:

1. Angled Parking (on Brown and Main Streets):

78 spaces/ 24 new trees; 10 votes

positives:

most parking
mirrors [east] downtown
more “envir” impact
business advantage

negatives:

fewer trees

2. Parallel Parking (on Brown and Main Streets):

61 spaces/ 72 new trees; 1 vote

positives:

most trees
better walking environment

negatives:

least # parking spaces
poor drivers [most difficult parking arrangement]

3. Combination Parking (parallel on Brown, angled on Main):

77 spaces/ 46 new trees; 6 votes

positives:

almost as many spaces [as angled]
mirrors [east] downtown

negatives:

October 21, 2003: Civic Design

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Introduction & announcements:

The City Council has rejected the angled parking configuration in favor of combined parking, because it wants to create more of a boulevard feel on Brown Street. It is also becoming apparent that parking configurations will have to be designed block by block to accommodate numerous trees and other conditions unique to each lot.

Carter Design Associates' (CDA's) presentation:

CDA presented three illustration boards as a starting point for discussion about clarifying/creating a consistent and coherent plan for the area streetscapes. The first display board was a plan diagram noting existing and future civic buildings. The streets are classified into types or patterns: Main Street, a commercial corridor with its 100-foot right-of-way, with dense shop fronts and short setbacks near Mays; Bagdad and Brown as secondary streets with 80-foot rights-of-way; Brown as the primary north-south street; and other local streets (Liberty, San Saba, Harris, Blair and Florence) as quieter, local streets; and the east-west alleys (effectively existing or not) on either side of Main Street as narrow service roads.

The variation in street type, purpose, destination and function suggest different setbacks and landscaping to differently frame the public realm. Main and Bagdad are envisioned as having strong connections to the future greenway along Lake Creek, thus creating significant pedestrian activity along the street, which could be enhanced with benches, wider sidewalks, and prominent shop displays. These are also more commercial streets, which require more services (deliveries, parking) than office or residential areas, so the alleys could be especially useful. The secondary streets are

envisioned as having more office, institutional and residential uses, which although still heavily used have less of a need for parking, and can therefore accommodate more landscaping on the street. The local streets, having primarily office and residential uses with still less need for parking, are envisioned as being quieter, with narrower traffic lanes and extensive landscaping on the street.

The second board listed area characteristics and grouped them into strengths and weaknesses, as to whether they helped to point toward a consistent character/identity for the Plan Area.

Strengths listed were the generous right-of-way with wide landscape areas, large trees, deep setbacks, the civic center, and the historic stone curbs and walls remaining in the Plan Area. The right-of-way and setbacks leave room to accommodate an attractive streetscape, and the trees and stone curbs give unique characteristics to work with and build on when designing it.

Some of the weaknesses listed were a lack of pedestrian amenities or consistent sidewalks and alleys, which contribute to a lack of consistency and definition of public areas, in addition to creating functional problems for pedestrians. Building encroachment into the right-of-ways implies that the public realm is weakly defined, and makes reestablishing that realm problematic. The fragmented nature of the historic building stock – the fact that buildings have been constructed and altered considerably over many years means that they have no particular common style, form or theme, other than being generally traditional.

The third board showed photos of different commercial and residential building forms, to encourage discussion of what forms would be appropriate for the area and how guidelines could be created to distinguish them. CDA also included two illustrations to demonstrate the cumulative effect that buildings of different forms might have. One illustration took an aerial photo of the 400 West Main small office complex, which covers about a quarter-block, and quadrupled it to show what the block might look like if all the properties were developed similarly. On the lower right is a similar illustration of a residential lot quadrupled to demonstrate what a block of houses on relatively large lots would look like. The implications for density, parking, landscaping and economy of overall land use are strikingly different.

Discussion:

- A participant suggested that there could be alternate parking requirements for the Plan Area, as there is not enough room for the number of spaces required under standard zoning requirements. Alternate standards could allow some parking spaces to be a short walk away rather than on-site. Perhaps street parking would be considered a community parking pool, a part of which could be counted toward a commercial establishment's parking requirement.
- There was a consensus about prohibiting "franchise architecture" in the Plan Area, but there were also reservations about having overly restrictive design regulations.
- There was an expressed preference for a more residential scale, which was described as including:
 - setbacks that are appropriate for the building type and the adjacent buildings
 - structures that have a residential look (other than civic buildings)
 - the preservation of large trees
- Several participants had concerns that densities would become too high. It was explained that one of the purposes of this Plan is to establish upper size and density limits for new construction. The market will determine how close to that limit developers will choose to build. The overall economy will determine the strength of the market.
- There was considerable discussion about the status of the alleys. In places where the alleys exist as public right-of-way they are used. In other places they are overgrown or even have structures built in them. Mr. Vining drew a diagram of how the alleys could add a significant amount of parking to the block, though the location is probably more suitable for employee parking than customer parking. Whether this arrangement is feasible depends partly on what utilities will be located in the alleys.

November 18, 2003: Defining Parameters for Mixed-Use Zoning

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-8:45 p.m.

Introduction & announcements:

The purpose of this meeting is to address compatibility issues as part of a proposed Mixed-Use Zoning District. In earlier meetings participants decided that a mixed-use zoning district would be appropriate for most of the Plan Area, and voted on what uses should be included as part of a mixed-use ordinance. The City Council is also interested in how such an ordinance might apply to other parts of the City.

Definitions:

The first two Southwest Downtown Plan workshops dealt with land use issues. One exercise compiled a list of land uses that participants agreed would be appropriate for the Plan Area (mostly small-scale residential and commercial uses). A second exercise looked at the current zoning and how it might be changed to include these land uses. Participants decided that a new “mixed-use” zone best described the combination they were looking for. In a third exercise the new zoning, including the mixed-use district, were mapped within the Plan Area.

Since the Mixed-Use Zoning District includes both residential and commercial uses, it is necessary to minimize any conflicts between neighboring properties with different uses. The next exercise will explore some of these conflicts and possible mitigation measures. First, though, there are some terms and concepts that should be defined:

Compatibility refers to issues that arise when adjacent properties have different land uses. It is for the most part an issue between single-family residential and other uses. Restaurants are typically very difficult to bring into existing neighborhoods, although it can be done successfully under the right conditions. The most common conflicts have to do with differences in the size of buildings on adjacent lots, noise and traffic generation, hours of operation, and smells. Compatibility standards are additional measures that a new use must take when building or moving in next to a different existing use, such as incorporating building or landscaping features to improve privacy or restricting business hours.

Controlling the relative **height** of adjacent buildings is a primary means of improving compatibility between different uses. A tall building may create light and privacy problems for a shorter building next to it. A block with buildings that are all the same height can have a uniform, master-planned look; varied heights appear more casual and spontaneous.

Setbacks (the distance that a structure must be from the property lines) give some control over the density and character of development, and can also help ease a transition between adjacent buildings with very different sizes or uses. Minimum setbacks are also imposed to prevent the spread of fires; independently owned buildings on adjacent lots with no setbacks share a common fireproof (“party”) side wall. These common-wall buildings are very common in traditional small-town architecture as attached storefronts and row houses.

Buffering is a design element used to improve compatibility between uses. Some of the more common buffering elements are landscaping requirements, sound walls, or other specific design features (for example, to improve privacy when a residential building is close to the street, raising the floor level or placing a low fence at the property line). [A handout illustrated a combination of buffers and setbacks in a case where multifamily units are developed around an open space; the buildings are set a consistent distance from each other and trees screen views into neighbors’ units. A similar effect occurs when alleys are used for parking, which acts as a buffer from properties across the alley.]

Compatibility exercise:

Participants were given handouts illustrating compatibility scenarios in which a single-family home was next to one of three different uses. They were then asked to write down what concerns they would have about the arrangement and what suggestions they had for improving the situation. The exercise assumed that the single-family house existed before the other use moved in later (into either a new or existing building), because the most conflicts occur between single-family residents and other uses. Participants were asked to think in personal terms, as though it were their house and something moved in next door; what conditions would they want the new building to meet to make the arrangement acceptable? Some instructions and questions came up with each of the scenarios:

Scenario #1 (house next to a three-story building):

- Would it make a difference if the properties were back-to-back?
- Think about issues like visual privacy – upper floors looking down into a neighboring building – and shading.

Discussion & comments:

- The most difficult thing about this scenario is the difference in height, which relates to the proximity to the lot line. Perhaps the number of these [tall] structures on a block could be limited.
- Not all blocks are the same – maybe there could be different height limits on Round Rock Avenue, Mays and Main.
- Perhaps the building could be no more than one story taller than the house [note: under the current zoning ordinance, single-family houses may be up to 2-1/2 stories tall].
- One participant suggested that the side setback of the three-story building be equal to its height. Planning Director Jim Stendebach noted that one of Austin's setback rules refers to a ratio of the building's height.
- Trees, a limestone wall and water noises were suggested as buffers.
- If there were a courtyard, the neighbor wouldn't have to look at a wall.
- Maybe the face or the side of the building should show some variation in setback [i.e. parts of the building's front and/or sides should be offset slightly to break up the wall mass].
- Zero-lot-line housing arrangements (in which houses have no setback on one side and a wider setback on the other) generally do not work in existing neighborhoods, because they only work with other zero-lot-line houses. In addition to the setback issue, there are also privacy issues to be dealt with; most zero lot line development requires that the side of the house on the property line (which looks onto the neighbor's property) have translucent windows or no windows.
- Consider the situation if the building is there first and the house is built next to it. Some communities have problems with tear-downs, where small houses on small lots are replaced by very large houses [West University in Houston, Clarksville in Austin]. Would a large house cause similar problems for a neighboring small house? What if the building were built smaller than necessary to accommodate a small house, and then the house was replaced with a large one?

The discussion concluded that design as well as size is very important in creating a successful pairing of buildings.

Scenario #2 (house next to townhouses/row houses):

- Under the current ordinance, townhouses can be as dense as 12 units per acre. How should the alleys work in this case? Should there be parking underneath?

- A participant asked if the townhomes had a front yard. They were answered that there would probably be a smaller one, and that this should be an issue to consider. Participants suggested a stoop or façade variations.

Discussion & comments:

- The same height issues in scenario #1 apply here [note: current ordinance permits both detached single-family homes and townhomes to be a maximum of 2-1/2 stories].
- Perhaps there could be only one story difference between the end unit of the townhomes and the house.
- What if the house is built taller than the townhome? What about the townhome residents' privacy?
- There was some confusion about where people park in a townhome arrangement, since the buildings are connected. Usually parking is in the rear, accessed through an alley or cul-de-sac, or there is a parking lot nearby.
- If the townhomes have a short front setback, a raised stoop could improve their privacy.
- Varied setbacks for the townhomes could avoid a "wall effect".

Again it was concluded that design considerations make all the difference. Design is normally not regulated except under special circumstances, which these appear to be.

Scenario #3 (house next to a restaurant [the restaurant is depicted as being in a large existing house]):

- Participants were instructed to remember that restaurants might be open late, serve alcohol, and/or create strong food smells.

Discussion & comments:

- One participant suggested that this arrangement only be permitted if the house and restaurant have the same owner.
- Greenery and plants would help the restaurant blend with the neighborhood.
- Restaurant noise and hours – and hours of trash collection – could be limited.
- Would it make a difference if they were across the alley from each other, or one lot over?
- Would it make a difference if the restaurant were a quiet little tearoom? It can be difficult to fit a commercial kitchen into an existing house, so the kinds of restaurants that could fit might be limited. Maybe the neighbor's permission should be required if they want a commercial kitchen, but not if it's a smaller-scale restaurant, like a tearoom.
- One participant noted that the most desired land use from earlier exercises was "eating establishments", but this discussion makes it sound like it would be impossible to locate one in the Plan Area. Another said that she had expected that any eating establishment would only be serving lunch.
- Mr. Stendebach noted that one of the mechanisms in the Zoning Ordinance is the special exception provision, in which additional uses are permitted within a district if they meet certain additional criteria and are approved by the Zoning Board of Adjustment in a public hearing. Perhaps this provision could be used for some uses, or to permit a third story to some buildings if they meet special design criteria.
- A participant asked how many single-family residences were left in the Plan Area [answer: between 15 and 16 residences].
- There was additional discussion on the complications that arise if the restaurant was established first and the resident moved in later.

Participants were asked to add any more comments they had to their handouts before they were collected.

February 3, 2004: Development Standards

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-8:45 p.m.

Construction updates:

The next building in the Municipal Office Complex (MOC) to be built is the Senior Activity Center. Construction should begin in a few months (perhaps April) and is expected to be completed in another 14-16 months for occupation in summer 2005.

As part of the MOC, PageSoutherlandPage (PSP) is preparing a utility plan for the entire Plan Area. This will include a centralized stormwater system and a set of street improvements to improve the Plan Area's appearance and accommodate utilities without harming the larger trees.

Tree preservation:

Accommodating the Plan Area's many large trees has made the utility improvement plan suddenly very complicated, since utilities cannot extend within the trees' drip lines without injuring their roots. The City's Arborist, Emsud Horozovic, is in the process of conducting a tree survey for PSP's utility plan. So far he has identified 14 trees that are at least 32 inches in diameter and another 61 trees between 16 and 32 inches in diameter in the Plan Area right-of-way. This tree survey will also be the basis for a southwest downtown tree preservation plan, which at this point can be generally summarized as follows:

1. Identify the "heritage trees" by size, species and health. Appropriate measures must be taken to protect the trees from damage during construction.
2. Design a street tree program - design a streetscape and parking to accommodate existing heritage trees whenever possible, and create a planting program to fill in the street tree canopy and replace trees that are ailing.
3. Develop a mitigation program for property owners who want to redevelop, creating incentives for tree preservation while implementing a replacement program when this is not possible.

Parking:

Planning and Public Works Staff are also working on a parking strategy for the Plan Area. It would proceed in phases as the area grows and parking needs increase. It would operate under the assumptions that the City offices and C-1 – Zoned properties (which are assumed to have higher development potential) will provide their own on-site parking, leaving street parking for the use of local businesses. The progression, as currently proposed, is summarized below:

1. A recent parking study estimated that there are currently approximately 290 street spaces in the Plan Area.
2. Street improvements funded as part of the Municipal Office Complex construction will raise the number of on-street parking spaces to over 300 (not including parking for MOC offices).
3. Street improvements are made to the other streets in the area, raising the total number of on-street spaces to around 360.
4. Townhouses and other residential properties will provide their own off-street parking so that residents don't have to compete with neighboring businesses' customers.
5. The Mixed-Use Zoning District will be defined as a new zoning category designed to take advantage of the increased street parking offered by smaller blocks, and to foster a pedestrian-

friendly environment. The parking requirement may be lowered from current requirements (an appropriate amount is being evaluated).

6. The City is looking at a few locations to construct supplemental parking lots (for public use), which at some point could be expanded as structured parking, if necessary.

Summary of Donna Carter's Report:

Carter Design Associates provided a draft of their design guidelines, including a summary of major points. Full discussion will be possible with their final report.

Objectives for Southwest Downtown Design Guidelines:

- Maintain a sense of connection with the historic street grid and single-family house traditions while accommodating new construction.
- Enhance connectivity between destinations.
- Minimize the impacts of increased automobile traffic.
- Enhance pedestrian activity.
- Continue the tradition of landscaped right-of-way and specimen tree planting at the street edge and in front yards.

Development standards:

(Re)development standards are still under discussion and evaluation, but based on compatibility discussions in earlier meetings, suggest that new construction be allowed to extend to side property lines when there is rear access to the property via an alley or similar. Front setbacks would be minimal: 10-15 feet for townhomes and less for commercial. It is also suggested that special accommodations be made for buildings next to existing single-family homes (used as homes, not businesses), such as:

- There must be at least 15 feet of separation between the existing home and a new neighboring building.
- The neighboring building may be no more than one story taller than the existing home.

These restrictions would *not* apply to buildings next to single-family homes that were built after the adoption of the Ordinance, as they are presumed to understand and accept the implications of living close to non-residential uses and to have made appropriate design accommodations.

Discussion:

There were questions about the amount of impervious cover that would be permitted as currently described, and concerns about flooding downstream. Staff explained that the utility plan would direct all the Plan Area's rainwater to a water quality pond just south of the railroad tracks, instead of each property providing its own water quality pond. The centralized water quality pond is more efficient overall, and puts much less of a burden on small property owners. The Creek will be part of a significant park and trail system, so the quality of the water running into it is taken very seriously.

A participant expressed a great sense of loss at losing the residential character of the neighborhood as it has been until recently, and dismay at the proposed permissible intensity of development.

Another participant expressed concern that changing to Mixed-Use (MU) zoning from General Commercial (C-1) would change the development potential of his property. He expected that at some point the market would support high-rises in downtown and that MU zoning would interfere with that. Staff responded that they did anticipate tall buildings in the Plan Area - but not in their lifetimes. Most lots are quite small and a developer would have to buy many of them and do considerable demolition to assemble a parcel large enough, whereas there are still many undeveloped large parcels near the highways and the future SH-130 which would be much simpler and less risky for large-scale

development. MU zoning would allow developers to take advantage of the street parking and walkability of a traditional street grid and allow more intense use of small properties, without waiting for a developer willing to go through the hassles of major land assembly. Other advantages of MU zoning are that it creates a common expectation that the Plan Area will continue to have a fine-grained traditional neighborhood feel that is more in scale with its traditional development pattern (which is what attracted many business owners in the first place - see survey); that it accommodates more residential uses; and that it restricts uses to those that can function well in close proximity to one another. The Southwest Downtown Plan is intended as an interim measure to allow moderately increased intensity of development on small parcels, until market demands necessitate higher-intensity development and large-scale land assembly.

A participant asked about the Light Industrial property in the Plan Area, and whether business would be shut down if zoning were changed to Mixed-Use. Existing uses are not shut down when there is a change in zoning of any kind; instead the property receives a nonconforming status, which means that operations cannot be expanded in that location. The next owner of the property may also continue the nonconforming use, but may not expand.

There was some confusion about the state of the street improvement plan. Currently the plan is to provide parallel parking on Brown and angled parking everywhere else, but as one begins to look at each street, with its trees and driveways, it becomes clear that any parking plan will have to be flexible and site-specific. It has also since been noted that on streets other than Main, angled parking significantly reduces sidewalk width, which may be undesirable.

April 6, 2004: Development Potential

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Presentation by Charles Heimsath, Capitol Market Research:

Executive Director Joe Vining introduced Mr. Charles Heimsath, whose firm, Capitol Market Research, studies commercial real estate markets in the Austin metropolitan area. The firm's primary products are due diligence reports and feasibility analyses for banks and real estate firms, usually for new construction. Its research is based on a biannual survey of the Austin metropolitan area's major office properties.

His research finds that the office market peaked in December of 2000. When young companies were unable to maintain funding, occupancy dropped from 96% to under 75%, leaving 8 million square feet vacant in a market of 33 million square feet. Rents soon dropped 25-40%. The firm's analysis concludes that enough excess capacity exists in the region that there will not be a need for new office construction until 2008-2009 at the earliest. A handout indicated that Round Rock's situation is similar, except that occupancy is lower, hovering around 70%.

He reminded the audience that this analysis refers only to office complexes over 10,000 square feet, and noted that there is still a good market for small offices, since there are many more businesses needing 1,500 square feet or less of office space than need 200,000 square feet. Low interest rates are making these properties attractive for small businesses to buy as well as rent. He noted that prices for these properties tend to be higher on a per square foot basis than for larger properties.

He shared a few observations about factors contributing to the success of smaller business properties/districts. It is essential for small-scale retail to have parking in front of the store - although it could be "teaser" parking - just enough that customers anticipate a spot in front, although most of the required parking may be a half-block away. He also noted locating all the parking to one side of a district is much less effective than having many smaller, well-distributed facilities.

Mr. Vining explained that the Southwest Downtown Plan is part of a strategy to improve the development climate in the Plan Area by improving the drainage, utilities and streets to foster

changes for the better over the long term. Mr. Heimsath agreed that any improvements that are sensitive to the Plan Area's character will improve the market for its properties.

Comments & questions:

- A participant commented that several times people have walked into her office and asked if she wanted to sell it.
- Another asked about how the future of the Austin real estate market would affect properties in Round Rock. Mr. Heimsath explained that in the long term the trend has been for construction to move outward as the supply of large parcels closer in is reduced. Of course, at this time a quarter of the office space closer to Austin is vacant. He referred to a handout showing the mean rent per square foot per year is \$18.35 in Austin and \$18.74 in Round Rock, but noted that there is only one property in Round Rock large enough to be counted in the survey.
- A third participant noted that the per square foot price can be misleading with smaller properties because there is more common space (bathrooms, kitchenettes) shared with other offices.
- A participant noted that every parking spot on Blair was taken today; one resident was frustrated that several people tried to park in her driveway and one had to be "shooed off" her lawn.
- There was a question about whether businesses would still have to provide off-street parking or whether their needs could be accommodated with on-street parking, and when would he find out so he could develop his property? Mr. Vining explained that Staff is trying to work out whether the street parking will be sufficient - which will depend on how many street parking spaces are available once accommodations are made for driveways and trees, checking with Public Works to be sure the streets won't be overburdened, and persuading the City Council to adopt the parking strategy. A southwest downtown parking plan might require setting up a special district to pay for shared parking facilities. The goal is to include a parking strategy included in the Southwest Downtown Plan.

July 13, 2004: Street Layout Design, Utilities and Drainage

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-8:45 p.m.

Welcome and announcements:

Executive Director Joe Vining welcomed participants, noting many new faces. He summarized the progress of the Plan in meetings over the last year and explained that the first half of this meeting would be to present the street and utility improvement plans prepared by consultants PageSoutherlandPage (PSP), and the second half to discuss some proposed changes in traffic routes and gauge the level of public support for them. He asked participants to consider the proposals in light of the neighborhood as a whole; matters concerning individual properties will be discussed in individual meetings with property owners.

Streetscape & parking presentation:

PSP Architect Sylvan Schurwanz presented the final plan for street and streetscape improvements. Some of the goals of the street improvement plan are to upgrade the utilities, increase the total on-street parking and make the street as attractive and interesting as possible in order to facilitate the transition to a mixed-use district. The improvement plan aims to achieve a balance between accommodating increased traffic and parking needs, and providing an attractive streetscape that incorporates the large old trees.

Most streets within the Plan Area will have two lanes with angled parking that provides pedestrians with a comfortable separation from moving traffic. Curbs will be routed around the older trees. The design of Main Street will be a variation on this pattern, with a center turning lane and angled parking,

reflecting the pattern on East Main Street. Brown Street will be a direct route from Round Rock Avenue to the new City Hall. It will be designed as a tree-lined avenue with parallel street parking and more street trees planted.

The total number of on-street parking spaces in the Plan Area will increase from 296 to approximately 339 spaces, although the final figure will be adjusted somewhat.

Utility plan presentation:

PSP Engineer Judd Willmann gave an overview of proposed utility upgrades for the Plan Area.

The two most important components of drainage are stormwater management and water quality, especially since the Plan Area is in the aquifer recharge zone. Models show that it will be better to drain the Creek relatively quickly rather than wait for the peak flow from upstream to arrive at the same time. The City will provide two water quality ponds, eliminating the need for ponds on individual properties. The first pond is currently under construction next to the Senior Activity Center, and will serve the northwest portion of the Plan Area; the second will be constructed downstream, on the other side of the railroad tracks to serve the district as a whole.

The water and wastewater systems will be generally upgraded. The lines have been resized to reflect future demand; main water lines under the City's sizing system will be 12". All existing buildings will be reconnected to new lines, and connections will be "stubbed out" to the property lines of undeveloped lots so that the streets won't need to be ripped up to provide connections in the future.

The dry utilities (gas, electric, phone, cable, fiber optic) will all be run through a single network of underground concrete channels that will also be able to accommodate future technologies. In most cases providers will be able to add new cable by pulling it through the ducting system without digging anything up. Public Works and PSP are working with utility providers to finalize a route that doesn't interfere with tree roots and other features.

Discussion:

- A participant was concerned about the net loss of parking spaces in front of her building. Currently she has five head-in spaces at the edge of her property, but under the street improvement plan the curb and sidewalks would be restored and there would be only three angled spaces directly in front of her property. It was explained that there is a trade-off between increasing the total number of parking spaces in the Plan Area and the number directly in front of individual properties. The whole Blair Street area is especially difficult because there is so much going on there. Accommodating delivery vehicles is also a concern. Again, participants were asked to make appointments with the Planning Department to discuss concerns regarding individual properties.
- Several participants asked for clarification of the construction schedule and how visitors will find their way around during the process. Construction will hopefully begin in 2005 and last about 24 months. Construction will proceed in several phases so that all streets will not be torn up at the same time. There will be pre-construction meetings with the neighborhood before construction begins. The City is looking at a consultant to work on a wayfinding system for the entire City, and wayfinding during and after the construction phase would be an aspect of that system.

Specific proposed transportation projects:

The second half of the meeting was given to the discussion of traffic improvements that emerged from brainstorming exercises in an earlier meeting. Proposals had been grouped into three main projects for discussion and prioritization.

Because there has been some confusion regarding the status of these projects, Mr. Vining took a moment to clarify the process for implementing the proposals. There is currently no funding or timeline for any of these proposals. If the neighborhood supports them, the next steps would be to

perform traffic studies and cost-benefit analyses, evaluate the priority of the proposals in relation to other public improvement projects, then obtain funding. The first step is to gauge the level of neighborhood support for pursuing the proposals further.

The proposed projects:



1) Extend Main Street to the IH-35 frontage road. This would require acquiring land and building a bridge over Lake Creek. The bridge would be one-way coming into downtown from the frontage road but the rest of Main Street would remain two-way. The bridge also has potential as marking a significant “gateway” to downtown.

Williamson County Commissioner Limmert has offered a historic bridge to the City, which could be used to span the Creek. The Rowe Valley Bridge was the first project by Brown & Root and currently spans the San Gabriel River near Hutto. The bridge has not been in use for many years and would not be the structural support for the bridge, but the arched sides could be attached to a contemporary concrete bridge [note: further investigation determined that moving the Rowe Valley Bridge would be prohibitively expensive].

Comments:

- The bridge looks a lot like the old railroad bridge over the Round Rock.
- Given growth rates in the Plan Area, would it make more sense to make the bridge two-way instead of one-way?
- Who would use the bridge? Most people passing through would use McNeil. Most of the people going into or through downtown come from RM 620, not the interstate. The answer to this question will probably change significantly when the changes to the exit and entrance ramps are completed.
- Would there be a pedestrian component of the bridge? There would be some kind of pedestrian connection to Lake Creek, which would be part of a citywide hike-and-bike trail system, but not to the frontage road.

2) Redesign the Round Rock Avenue – Main – Mays and Liberty – Mays intersections. There are 3 parts to this proposal:

- a) Close Round Rock Avenue between Brown and Mays. This area could be used for park space.
- b) Divert traffic from Round Rock Avenue to Liberty and install a signal at Liberty and Mays.
- c) Reconnect Main Street across Mays in a 4-way intersection.

Comments:

- It's not a good idea to close Round Rock Avenue – it's been there over 100 years and is one of the most important streets in the City
- How would you get into downtown if Round Rock Avenue were closed? To get to downtown from the west you would go from Round Rock Avenue to Liberty and right on Mays, or from Round Rock Avenue right on Brown and left on Main.
- Wouldn't it hurt downtown businesses by making access from the freeway indirect?
- You want to take cut-through traffic out of downtown because you want people to stop and park and shop there. It's more friendly if it's less busy.
- Having a park downtown could be an attraction for downtown, which needs them.
- Would there still be access to the properties on Round Rock Avenue? One property would need a driveway extension but the rest have access to other streets.
- In order to close Round Rock Avenue the City would have to acquire it from TxDOT and then decide if closing the street is appropriate.
- Five-way intersections can be distinctive and make an area interesting and distinctive.
- A lot of people get confused by the Round Rock Avenue – Main – Mays intersection. They think Main is a bend in Round Rock Avenue.
- There's a big problem with people cutting through downtown to avoid routes with more lights. This plan would make the downtown route less appealing.
- Would East Liberty be widened too? Would it become a major route for people cutting through downtown to the Georgetown Bridge? East Liberty would have to be widened to four lanes, but we can't tell for how far yet – perhaps for 1-3 blocks.

3) Extend Harris Street north to intersect with Round Rock Avenue. This was originally suggested as a way to provide a direct route to and from the new Senior Activity Center. The City would have to acquire the property that is now the Golden Chick, and Liberty would have to be terminated in a cul-de-sac on the west side of Brown Street to provide access to businesses and keep the Round Rock Avenue – Liberty – Brown intersection manageable.

[There were no comments referring to this proposal.]

Ballots were distributed that asked participants to assign a priority to the three proposals or to indicate if they thought the proposal inappropriate. Ballots were collected as participants departed.

September 21, 2004: Summary of the Vision of the Southwest Downtown Plan

McConico Building Community Room, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Introduction:

Executive Director Joe Vining gave a quick overview of the Plan, putting it in context. All of the City's other area and neighborhood plans have dealt with developing or newly developed areas; this is the first to directly address redevelopment. The Southwest Downtown Plan will be an umbrella set of recommendations for ordinances and policies to support the vision of the Plan and coherently shape redevelopment. These recommended ordinances will include:

- 1) Adding a new Mixed-Use Zoning District to the Zoning Ordinance;
- 2) Rezoning parts of Southwest Downtown to a Mixed-Use Zoning District;
- 3) Adopting a tree preservation plan;
- 4) Implementing infrastructure improvement plans to improve drainage, add utility capacity and improve the streetscape
- 5) Implementing a Parking Plan to manage current and future parking needs for the Plan Area as a whole.

Street, sidewalk & utility improvements:

Planning, Public Works and PageSoutherlandPage are finalizing the street and utility improvement plans. Construction should begin early in 2005.

Questions/comments:

- A participant asked if utility service would be interrupted during construction and was assured that any interruptions would be minimal.
- Some utilities will be routed through some alleys.
- Will the street improvement plan provide handicapped access? All sidewalks and public facilities must be accessible, but it is a bit unusual to apply ADA standards to street parking and to the district as a whole instead of to individual properties.

Proposed changes in street layouts:

There has been a considerable confusion regarding the proposed street layout changes that were discussed and voted on at the last workshop. **These proposals are not part of the street and utility improvement project.** They were proposed at an earlier workshop about transportation, and the last workshop's vote was to gauge neighborhood support for pursuing them further. For any of the proposals to be adopted the City would have to hire an independent engineer to complete a Traffic Impact Analysis to be sure there are no unforeseen effects, the proposals would have to pass public hearings with the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council, Public Works would have to find an appropriate spot in their schedule, and voters would have to approve funding in a bond election. For some of the proposed changes, the City would have to persuade TxDOT to release control of Round Rock Avenue. The earliest any of these projects could be approved for construction is 2008.

Voting at the July 13, 2004 workshop prioritized the proposals as follows:

- 1) Extend Main Street to the IH-35 frontage road
- 2) Changes to the Liberty – Mays and Mays – Main – Round Rock Avenue intersections (signal at Liberty & Mays, connect East and West Main Street, close Round Rock Avenue between Brown and Mays)
- 3) Changes to the Liberty – Harris – Round Rock Avenue intersection (extending Harris to Round Rock Avenue and closing part of Liberty)

A few people did not vote or voted against some or parts of the proposals.

Further investigation has determined that it is unrealistic to move the Rowe Valley Bridge to cross Lake Creek. Releasing the bridge from the state system would take a minimum of five years, and everything from the lead paint on makes it prohibitively expensive. There is still interest in incorporating a similar traditional design.

Questions:

- Participants inquired what was the intent of the proposals to close Round Rock Avenue and extend Harris to Round Rock Avenue [see July 13, 2004 meeting].
- If Round Rock Avenue were closed, what would take its place? Suggestions have ranged from park space to a parking garage. The participant replied that it's expensive to take out that much commercial space.

Parking plan:

Planning Director Jim Stendebach outlined a parking strategy. The small blocks in the Plan Area accommodate more street parking than usual, and the street improvement plan will increase overall street parking from 296 to 340+ spaces. Since this pool of shared parking is more efficient than individual lots, parking requirements in the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning District can be reduced.

In the proposed Mixed-Use (MU) Zoning District, street parking should be able to serve both existing businesses and the conversion of existing structures to commercial use. These structures will have no off-street parking requirement. New structures and additions will be subject to a reduced parking requirement that is approximately half of what would be required under C-1 (General Commercial) zoning. This requirement could be met by providing parking on-site, within 500 feet of the property, or by paying into a fund for public parking facilities.

Residential development in MU will be required to provide on-site off-street parking. Standard parking requirements would apply in all other zoning districts.

Questions & Comments:

- A participant noted that the main parking problem now is that most of the street parking spaces are taken up with employee parking so there is little room for customers – especially on the 100 block of West Main where there is no room for off-street parking. Staff answered that this is a case where it's the responsibility of the owners to require that their employees park further away, leaving the spaces in front for customers. Another participant noted how parking on the courthouse square in Georgetown has improved since they put 2-hour limits on parking on the square, and businesses required their employees to park a block or two away on a lot provided for them. Here, the lot for City employees at the end of Brown Street frees up street parking near the McConico building.
- Wouldn't a restaurant owner be in for a rude awakening when customers don't have anywhere to park? Different kinds of restaurants have different parking needs – street parking should be sufficient for most restaurant types at the size of the existing buildings in the Plan Area – if they expanded they would be subject to an off-street parking requirement. Also, these are minimum requirements – those who anticipate needing more parking they are welcome to provide it.
- How does the reduced parking requirement compare to, for example, Wal-Mart's? Wal-Mart has very high customer density and chooses to build significantly more parking than the city requires; it's their policy to design for After-Thanksgiving-Sale crowds. The downside is the sea-of-asphalt aesthetic and the expense of providing spaces that are unused most of the year.
- It should be noted that the City only specifies minimum parking requirements – if a property or business owner thinks that their property/business would benefit from additional parking they may provide as much as they wish.

- This proposal should be taken as the concept for the parking plan – many specifics cannot be resolved immediately. One issue is what will happen with the fire department site at Blair and Bagdad – will it be a fire station, and EMS station, or will the fire department decide not to use it?
- When will the fire department decide whether to keep a station in the Plan Area? It's difficult to guess because the Department is currently looking for a new Chief and Deputy Chief at the same time. They will also have to balance service needs against other parts of the city.
- There were concerns about the distribution of street parking, which is limited by various physical constraints. Concerns about individual properties should be discussed in a meeting with Planning Department Staff.
- The Municipal Office Complex will be another source of after-hours public parking. The MOC will not have a reduced parking requirement, as it will not be in the MU Zoning District. It will provide enough parking for daytime needs, and after business hours will be open to the public.
- Where would this be stated as policy? Parking requirements are part of the Zoning Ordinance. These changes are proposed for the new MU Zoning District, which would be an amendment to the current ordinance. There will be a summary of the ordinance included in the Plan, but the rules would not change until the new ordinance is adopted and the area zoning changed.
- Could you count the street spaces directly in front of your lot toward your off-street parking requirement? No, the street spaces would be absorbed into the pool that covers the parking requirement that is waived for the existing area of the building. The parking requirement applied to new construction and additions may not be met with street parking but must be provided on site or off-street within 500 feet or with a contribution to a fund for public parking facilities.
- Parking meters are not being considered at this time.
- How will parking be handled during jury calls? Jurors will be accommodated in the MOC facilities when they are completed.
- A participant requested some sort of timeline on the website to keep track of the various plans and ordinances in progress. Staff answered that it may be helpful, but it should be understood that the timeline is very much subject to change. Also there are really two timelines – the Plan and Zoning Ordinance timeline and the street and utility improvement construction timeline.

Tree preservation plan:

Rather than creating a special policy for the Southwest Downtown Area, the Plan will use the existing Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance with the stipulation that all mitigation funds collected in the Plan Area will be spent there as well.

Zoning changes:

In the last decade or so, the Plan Area has become a patchwork of zoning districts as some properties convert to commercial use and others choose to maintain residences. The result is that very incompatible uses are permitted close to each other, and one property may have to be rezoned in order to have the same use as its neighbor. Also the existing zoning districts are geared for new construction and their density and parking requirements are unwieldy in a traditional development with small blocks and lots.

In the first few workshops participants decided to simplify zoning in the district to three districts: C-1 (General Commercial) for properties with IH-35 frontage, PF (Public Facilities) for the Municipal Office Complex, and a new Mixed-Use Zoning District for most properties. The Mixed-Use District reflects the constraints and potential of the Plan Area with a distinct set of land uses, development standards and design standards [see Appendix C: District Ordinance Summary].

The Mixed-Use Zoning Ordinance specifies a range of land uses appropriate for a small-scale area where commercial and residential uses may coexist in close proximity. Especially intense, noxious or

large-scale uses have been excluded. Density and Development standards describe lot sizes, setbacks and height limits appropriate for the area's small lots, and define parking standards that make use of the ample street parking.

The design standards encourage consistency with the Plan Area's existing architecture and increased visual interest at the pedestrian scale, based on recommendations from Carter Design Associates. Compatibility standards apply to properties adjacent to single-family homes, which were not designed to be in close proximity to non-residential uses. They include additional restrictions on use, proximity and height – other accommodations are under consideration.

Mr. Vining referred to a chart comparing the C-1 and MU Zoning Districts (most properties are currently zoned C-1): He noted that lots in MU are permitted to be narrower, in keeping with their original platting. The biggest differences are height limits and parking requirements. MU limits building height to 3 stories instead of 5, but it should be noted that with C-1 development and parking standards it is nearly impossible to build a 5-story building on lots as those in SWDT, except in awkward configurations such as two floors of office over three of parking or by combining many lots. Part of the purpose of the Plan is to promote development.

Parking standards were relaxed because the pool of shared street parking is more efficient than individual lots, which are also difficult to accommodate on small lots. Other cities that have undergone similar revitalizations have found standard parking requirements excessive. If a high-volume chain restaurant wanted to move into the Plan Area, there might have to be some adjustments.

The new Mixed-Use Zoning District does put a few businesses into nonconforming status, but overall makes the Plan Area much more developable (nonconforming status means that the use is allowed to continue in that location, but may not expand).

Questions & comments:

- [relating to compatibility standards] What if someone built a three-story building that looked like a two-story building? The story limit is a height issue, not an aesthetic one, so this would not be acceptable.
- Under the design standards of the proposed ordinance, pole-mounted, roof-mounted and attached cabinet or box signs are not permitted – what kinds of signs *are* permitted? A sign ordinance already exists for the area, and is currently being updated. Some signs that are allowed are façade signs, monument signs, awning signs and signs that hang from poles. Existing signs are grandfathered in.
- How will this affect loan criteria [asked by a property owner who had found that banks would not extend a residential mortgage to a commercially-zoned house]? Problems in qualifying for a commercial property loan generally involve noncompliance with existing ordinances, such as a non-approved use or insufficient parking. Clearly stating that both residential and commercial uses are permitted and specifying parking requirements that can realistically be met on the Plan Area's small lots should make it easier to certify that properties are in full compliance with zoning requirements.
- A participant asked how the public would be notified about public hearings. For hearings regarding the Plan affected parties will be notified through mailings, emails and the website. There will also be posted meeting agendas and notification in the local newspapers. To rezone properties to MU, by law all property owners subject to the zoning change and those within 300 feet of them must be notified by certified mail.
- A participant asked about the displacement of historically disadvantaged populations. The Plan includes rezoning to explicitly permit residential use and compatibility standards to minimize effects of redevelopment on those who choose to remain – so it is not expected that anyone will be displaced.

Goals summary of the Southwest Downtown Plan:

Staff presented a summary of goals that the Southwest Downtown Plan was designed to achieve:

Goals of the Southwest Downtown Plan

Accommodate change in the area while:

- Incorporating public input in the planning process.
- Revitalizing the district's infrastructure, including streets, curbs, sidewalks, utilities and drainage.
- Accommodating existing single-family residences by examining the compatibility of land uses.
- Providing for new uses and for the redevelopment of existing buildings.
- Increasing public and private parking.
- Protecting the special character of the area
- Creating a pedestrian-friendly environment

A participant commented that he believed the Plan as presented would not just protect but enhance the Plan Area's character.

Work on the plan will continue through October. City Staff will present a complete draft of the Plan at the next meeting (mid-November). The Plan will then go to the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council in early 2005.